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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASUNCION 000431

SIPDIS

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POSTS FOR PAOS AND CAOS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AMERICAN VOICES BRINGS BLACK HISTORY MONTH TO
PARAGUAY

1. Summary: In conjunction with performances for Embassy San Jose, Embassy Tegucigalpa and Embassy Managua, Embassy Asuncion hosted Daniel Washington, baritone, and John Ferguson, pianist, for four concerts the week of 2/21 in commemoration of Black History month. An estimated 750 people attended the concerts. Media coverage was unusually extensive and included a live broadcast by a Ciudad del Este radio station with an estimated listenership of 500,000. The musicians also provided training for Paraguay's up-and-coming vocalists at the National Conservatory of Music. Audience members offered the band a standing ovation in several venues and staff received many expressions of profuse thanks for having brought such skilled musicians to Paraguay. The enthusiasm and fantastic talent of Washington and Ferguson contributed significantly to the resounding success of the program. End summary.

Performances

2. The concerts were held at the Ambassador's residence, at the Asuncion bi-national center, in Villarrica (a mid-sized university town) and in Ciudad del Este, Paraguay's second-largest city located in the strategic Tri-Border region. The Asuncion bi-national center, Villarrica and Ciudad del Este performances were free and open to the public.

3. The guest list for the reception and performance at the Ambassador's residence consisted of forty of the most influential Embassy contacts. The Minister of Finance, a very high-profile government official, was in attendance. This elite group was impressed by Ferguson and Washington's remarkable talent and enchanted by their moving renditions of little-known African-American spirituals.

4. The following day the duo gave a master class at the National Conservatory of Music. Several of the students were so impressed by the musicians that they attended the concert that same evening at the Paraguayan American Cultural Center. The Ambassador also attended this performance, which was preceded by the Center's annual VIP anniversary reception. The 300-seat theatre was virtually full and enthusiastic spectators from all walks of life were heard marveling at the speed with which Ferguson's fingers danced across the keys. At the conclusion of the program, the master class students could be seen, wide-eyed, with programs in hand, tentatively asking for autographs from Washington and Ferguson, who graciously provided them and offered the students advice on how to continue their professional development.

5. Villarrica, a university town of approximately 50,000 situated 3 hours outside of Asuncion, was the next stop on Ferguson and Washington's Paraguayan tour. As there was no piano to be had in the town nor anywhere in the surrounding area, post's PAO sent her Clavinova electronic piano for the performance, which was transported in the back of an Embassy Suburban. The predominantly college-aged crowd was captivated by the performance and many stayed afterwards to practice their English and chat with the musicians.

6. Ciudad del Este was Ferguson and Washington's final venue. Approximately 400 people attended this performance, ranging from the newly appointed bishop to the local director of tourism to members of the area's large Lebanese community to a group of recently immigrated Chinese piano students. The crowd demanded an encore with a standing ovation and many individuals approached Embassy staff and enthusiastically lobbied for future cultural programming in their area.

Media Coverage

7. Media coverage of the tour was unusually extensive. All three major Paraguayan dailies published multiple stories on the tour. "La Nacion", Paraguay's third largest, business-oriented daily, ran articles for four consecutive days. In addition, the Ciudad del Este paper covered the performance.

18. Radio Nanduti, the most listened-to radio station in Paraguay, aired an interview with the musicians and broadcast cuts from their CDs for several days leading up to the performances. Ciudad del Este-based Radio Magnifico, with an estimated listenership of 500,000, carried the concert live and in its entirety, vastly increasing the reach of this program.

19. A local cable television station in Villarrica interviewed the musicians prior to the concert and also broadcast the first few songs to their audience of several thousand.

Funding

10. American Voices' Paraguay/Costa Rica/Honduras/Nicaragua tour was Post-funded by the four participating Embassies. International airfare was shared between the Posts while local institutions provided in-kind support.

11. Comment: One of Post's MPP strategies is to broaden the audience reached by public diplomacy programs. Since Paraguay is a music-loving country and U.S. groups are a rarity, musical events, and in particular public-access performances, are a perfect way to help meet this goal. In addition, as the program consisted of songs selected in commemoration of Black History month, awareness of cultural diversity within the U.S. was increased among attendees. The program also gave Post the opportunity to promote mutual understanding with the Paraguayan people by sharing a unique part of American culture through the universal medium of music. End comment.

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